

**idn** E-Briefing Papers

# The War in Ukraine from a Gender Perspective

International Seminar

Helena Carreiras, Hanna Maliar, Irene Fellin, Nuno Lemos Pires, Katharine A. M. Wright,  
Ignacio Fonseca, Jenny Mathers, Olena Suslova, Marco Capitão Ferreira

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Conference proceedings of the international seminar organized by the Portuguese Ministry of National Defence, on 26 April 2023 in Lisbon.

**Contributors:**

Helena Carreiras, Hanna Maliar, Irene Fellin, Nuno Lemos Pires, Katharine A. M. Wright, Ignacio Fonseca, Jenny Mathers, Olena Suslova, Marco Capitão Ferreira.

**Abstract:**

This *IDN E-Briefing Paper* intends to disseminate the results of the International Seminar “The War in Ukraine from a Gender Perspective”, organized by the Ministry of National Defence, on 26 April 2023 in Lisbon. This seminar aimed to offer a thorough analysis of the gendered consequences of the war against Ukraine, focusing on the critical elements that policymakers should draw from in order to ensure a solid foundation for security in Europe and its consequences around the world. It also provided preliminary lessons in the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine from a gender perspective.

**Resumo:**

Este *IDN E-Briefing Paper* pretende divulgar os resultados do seminário internacional “The War in Ukraine from a Gender Perspective”, organizado pelo Ministério da Defesa Nacional, a 26 de abril de 2023 em Lisboa. Este seminário teve como objetivo oferecer uma análise detalhada das consequências genderizadas da guerra na Ucrânia, focando nos elementos críticos que os *policymakers* devem ter em conta para garantir uma base sólida para a segurança na Europa e no mundo. Procurou também fornecer lições preliminares sobre o conflito armado entre a Rússia e a Ucrânia, através de uma lente de género.

## Concept Note

NATO's new Strategic Concept reiterates its commitment to integrate the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda across all tasks and to continue to advance gender equality as a reflection of our shared values<sup>1</sup>.

The conflict in Ukraine represents a fundamental attack on our democracies and values. Gender equality as a threat to traditional values is being used strategically by the Russian Federation as a political and military tool, with the aim of questioning the principles of the world order we are living in.

The best way to protect our security is to stand united. We must keep up this momentum to enhance our collective readiness and responsiveness, and to this end the centrality of integrating the gender perspective is undeniable. We must ensure that WPS and gender perspective continue to be included in our support to Ukraine, in response to the full-scale Russian invasion.

This event will identify relevant insights on the gender perspective of the conflict for NATO and its partners – including in the context of the NATO-EU strategic partnership –, acknowledging that many of the lessons identified concern the Alliance collectively, as well as its member and partner nations individually.

Moreover, it will explore how to foster the implementation of the WPS Agenda within the Alliance, considering what concrete actions are needed to operationalize WPS in all of NATO's tasks going forward. This will enable NATO to think more creatively and comprehensively about evolving security challenges, enhancing its resilience and giving a better understanding of the environment in which it operates, ensuring strategic, operational and tactical effectiveness on the ground.

Finally, considering the next NATO Summit in Vilnius, in July, this event also aims to address, from a gender perspective, additional steps to strengthen our deterrence and defence, as well as to continue our unwavering support for Ukraine.

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<sup>1</sup> NATO, *Strategic Concept*, 2022, available at <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

## Program

TIME	TOPIC
09.30-09.40	Opening Remarks by Prof. Helena Carreiras, Portuguese Minister of National Defence
09.40-09.50	Keynote Speech by Ms. Hanna Maliar, Deputy Minister of Defence of Ukraine (video message)
09.50-11.05	<p><b>High Level Plenary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Irene Fellin, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security</li> <li>• Ms. Burcu San, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Operations</li> <li>• Major General Nuno Lemos Pires, National Defence Policy Director</li> </ul> <p>Moderator: Lieutenant Colonel Diana Morais, Head of the Equality Office of the Portuguese Ministry of National Defence</p>
11.05-11.20	Coffee break
11.20-12.50	<p><b>Expert Panel “The Gender Perspective of the War in Ukraine – preliminary lessons”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Katharine A. M. Wright, Senior Lecturer in International Politics at Newcastle University</li> <li>• Mr. Ignacio Fonseca, Analyst at Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre</li> <li>• Dr. Jenny Mathers, Senior Lecturer in International Politics, Aberystwyth University</li> <li>• Ms. Olena Suslova, Founder at Women's Information Consultative Center</li> </ul> <p>Moderator: Brigadier General Ana Baltazar, National Defence Policy Deputy Director</p>
12.50-13.00	Closing Remarks by Marco Capitão Ferreira, Portuguese Secretary of State for Defence

## **Opening Remarks by Prof. Helena Carreiras, *Portuguese Minister of National Defence***

More than one year after Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, we stand unwaveringly in support of the Ukrainian people and government and reaffirm our solidarity with the defence of their territory and population, and of our shared democratic values.

During this period, we have been inspired by the resilience of the Ukrainians, their leadership and particularly the bravery of their Armed Forces in this fight for freedom, that is also our freedom.

Ukrainians are the key pillar of national resistance, which means that they are also the ones most affected. Men, women, children, and the elderly are being differently impacted for many reasons. Taking these differences into account is important to understand the dynamics of conflict, assess reconstruction efforts and ensure that our position is grounded by a strong commitment to justice and equality. That is why including a gender perspective in our reflections might prove particularly useful.

This seminar is a contribution from Portugal to this important discussion, that I hope will inspire further action. I want therefore to thank the Equality Office of the Portuguese Ministry of National Defence for organizing this timely initiative and the National Defence Institute for hosting it. Likewise, I want to thank all the speakers and moderators in today's event for sharing their views with this vast audience, both here in Lisbon, in Kyiv, and virtually.

The landscape of war and peace is not gender neutral, as the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325 recognised. Studies have shown a positive correlation between country rankings of global peace and gender equality. Further commitments from the international community to gender equality and to sustainable peace must therefore be inevitably linked. Indeed, strengthening gender equality and women's rights is both a human rights obligation and key for cultivating peace. As the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 demonstrated, the participation of women at all levels is key to the operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes and peacebuilding efforts.

We know that women have been central to efforts to countering Russian aggression, since 2014, when Moscow illegally annexed Crimea and decided to back up separatists in the Donbass region. That has been very well documented by multiple international organizations and media outlets.

When the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, women joined the frontlines as volunteers, journalists, medical staff, and military personnel in the army and in volunteer battalions. As civil society organisations worked to support internally displaced people (IDPs), women activists and NGOs played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance.

After more than one year since Russia's invasion, it is worth inquiring what additional lessons have been identified from a gender perspective.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 24 February 2022, one-third of Ukrainians have been forced out of their homes. This is the largest human displacement crisis in the world today. Out of the 15 million forcibly displaced people, 90% are women and children.

We see that also in Portugal, where among the almost 60.000 refugees welcomed so far, more than 34.000 are women. Nearly 14.000 temporary protection requests have also been granted to minors, accounting for 25% of the total number of Ukrainians in the country.

There is also mounting evidence that conflict-related sexual violence is being used as a tactic of war. According to a survey conducted last April, 93% of Ukrainians know of such crimes committed by Russian forces, and 20% personally know someone who has been subjected to sexual violence committed by Russian troops. The international community is bound to investigate such crimes, and Portugal strongly supports these efforts.

We have seen pictures of women and children fleeing as refugees. But there is less talk about the impact on them leaving their husbands, fathers, children. Ukrainian men face increased vulnerability as they lack access to both financial resources and social networks. With women and children being prioritised in shelters, men's access is more limited.

We see women voluntarily joining the army to save their own country and to protect their children; though for some, choosing whether to leave their kids behind to fight and defend their country is the real dilemma.

In this dire scenario, Russia has been found to systematically use disinformation as a strategic tool to undermine social cohesion in European countries, using the war against Ukraine as a pretext. Sexuality and gender-based narratives have featured highly in Russia's campaigns.

We have seen examples of disinformation that build upon these preconceived ideas. In such stories, the implication is that if you are a member of NATO and have soldiers stationed on the ground, close to the eastern flank, they bring violence and moral degradation.



Ladies and gentlemen,

Differences in gender roles and stereotypes impact everything we do. That is why 23 years ago, the UN Security Council established the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This global push broadly attempts to address the inequitable experiences of women in conflict and supports and promotes their role in peace processes, including negotiations.

The discrepancies between how Russia and Western democracies have engaged with the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda, also highlight a real difference in the way we interact with our allies and partners. Gender is clearly one of the many possible frameworks for addressing the multiple impacts of this war, and we can support Ukraine in this context. Portugal is bound by these commitments and we stand ready to do even more, bilaterally and together with our allies and partners in the European Union, in NATO and other multilateral fora.

That is why, following the many conversations I have held in the last months with Minister Reznikov, namely on February 24<sup>th</sup>, in Kyiv, and based on the lessons identified by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, we began studying the possibility of developing military uniforms and clothing for women who are fighting in the frontline and require suitable equipment.

This comes on the heels of the donation of five armoured ambulances that I announced last week in Ramstein, in the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, and which elevates our combined military assistance to a total of more than 950 tonnes of material, in addition to the humanitarian support already provided thus far.

Today, more than ever, we are faced with the challenge to meet words with actions, and to place women at the heart of our efforts to reach peace and security in Europe and elsewhere. As a Ukrainian female veteran said over women's motivation to join the fight: "Women have the same reasons as men for joining – We want to keep Ukraine free."

Thank you very much and I wish you all fruitful discussions.

## **Keynote Speech by Ms. Hanna Maliar, *Deputy Minister of Defence of Ukraine***

Greetings to all participants of the workshop on behalf of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

I express sincere gratitude for the opportunity for the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine to participate in this event.

The 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2023 marked the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, we can already analyse the experience of waging war, including the one concerning gender issues.

Even before the full-scale invasion, we had equal opportunities for men and women. Equal access to all positions for privates, non-commissioned officers and as well as military ranks and equal responsibility during military service.

Nevertheless, the full-scale war presented us with new challenges, including gender issues.

During the years of the war against Ukraine, since 2014, the number of female service members has increased by 2.5 times. Currently, the number of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is 60.000, among them 43.000 are military. More than 5.000 female service members take part in the hostilities. Our women are mobilized and sent to the front line only by their consent.

The war gave us an interesting experience regarding the problems of women. For instance, in combat conditions, the flaws of field uniforms and body armour used by women became clear. Nowadays new samples of field uniforms for women are being tested. Women wear this uniform in a test mode. If these tests are successful, the production of new women's field uniforms will be launched.

In addition to field uniforms, we also continue work on providing our female defenders with body armour, where anthropological features are taken into account. An experimental sample of body armour for women has already been developed. Currently, meetings with potential manufacturers are in process.

The war has also shown vulnerable areas, in particular hygiene in the field. Another problem faced by both military and civilian women who have children.

The war leaves no choice for a woman. If a man is a person liable for military service, then only a woman can take the child out of the city or country. That is why our women are mobilized by their consent, so that families with children can take them out if they choose to do so.

Thus, the war presents other perspectives on gender issues and we take this new experience into account in our work.

## High Level Plenary

**Irene Fellin**

*NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security*

**I. Introduction**

We know that everything has changed since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The horrific crimes committed against the civilian population, which include willful killing, torture, inhumane treatment, forced deportation and sexual violence, have been recognized by the Commission of Inquiry for Ukraine. The war is no longer taking place only between armed forces. Civilians have always been a part of conflict in the past, but there is a sense that now they are the real target – the civilian population and the values that Ukrainians represent. These horrific crimes affect and harm all – women, men, boys, girls, civilians and soldiers, but also the infrastructure, cultural property, livelihoods and the environment. This will have a long-term impact on the entirety of Ukrainian society and beyond.

We know that war affects individuals differently. This was one of the driving factors of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, more than two decades ago. We also know that this resolution came from civil society. Remaining in dialogue with civil society as NATO's SGSR is therefore extremely important. Security and gender are cross-cutting issues. It is essential that we at NATO and in the defence sector implement, understand and translate this agenda. The resolution was land marking, as it was the first time the roles and responsibilities of women in security were put at the core of the discussion of the United Nations Security Council. The specific and differentiated needs of women and children are driving my and the Allies' thinking when we face the challenges posed by the security environment today.

It is important to note that we need to address the needs, roles and responsibilities of women in times of peace if we want to support them during times of war. It is more difficult to address inequalities when you are under shelling. Women, Peace and Security (WPS) is an agenda about empowerment, which talks about women's role within society. We all have the responsibility today to do this at home, and support partners and Allies when they are under threat or at war. We cannot fix problems caused by a patriarchal society and an unequal division of power during war if they have not been addressed during peacetime. When we speak of UNSCR 1325 and WPS more broadly, it is important to keep talking about participation, empowerment and women's leadership in decision-making in all contexts.

## II. What is the SGSR's role and NATO's way of implementing UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda?

The agenda was not developed strictly for the defence context, but it is important for NATO. We need to make it our own and adapt it to our core tasks and values. By recognizing the disproportionate impact conflict has on women and girls, we recognize the vital role women play in peace and security, and the importance of integrating a gender perspective in all that we do. Work on implementing the WPS agenda is now supported across NATO by women, men, civilians and the military. It is a given now. It is not under discussion anymore. Back in 2014, when I was an adviser to the first SGSR, it was not a given. We still had to explain to colleagues why we are doing this. Now, there is no discussion needed. The question we face now is how to best implement the agenda. In 10 years, we have come a long way.

NATO adopted its first policy in 2007 and its first action plan in 2010, when the focus was on integrating gender perspective in operations. It was a reflection of the global security context, with NATO being heavily present in Afghanistan and Kosovo. This was the core business of NATO. Now, the security context has changed. The implementation of WPS is across all core tasks, as stated in the new Strategic Concept, which was adopted last year in Madrid. When we negotiated it, it was clear to me that we need to embed the concept of WPS and Human Security (HS) within the Strategic Concept. It is the document that gives a vision of the Alliance's priorities for the next decade. No Strategic Concept before had ever included a reference to HS and WPS. This is an achievement and a milestone in NATO's implementation of the agenda. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine demonstrates every day the strong impact of conflict on the civilian population and women.

At a time when the values of the Alliance are being challenged, this recognition is fundamental. The gender perspective is not a nice-to-have, an add-on, an exercise, a tick-the-box. It is a reflection of who we are. We now all recognize these values, and we will fight to protect them, as seen in the context of our support for Ukraine. The integration of the gender perspective changed from the tactical and operational to the political and strategic levels. We are now looking to implement these strategic goals into practical and impactful results. We do this by integrating a gender perspective across all tasks and all challenges the Alliance faces, now and in the future. A gender perspective also helps us understand the human environment in which NATO is going to operate, and the distinct impact of our actions on women and men. Women play a key role in preserving communities from insecurity and conflict. Their economic and social responsibility increases in times of war. We need to recognize the role women can and do play within their communities, but also at the political

level, and their role in peace negotiations and mediation, when they have the opportunity to be a part of the conversation and have a seat at the table. Women address the root causes of conflict and help achieve positive peace – one which is not merely about stopping violence and bombing in the short term, but is sustainable in the long run.

### **III. How does the new security environment impact the work we do at NATO concretely?**

We are in a learning process. It is not easy to put the content of the Strategic Concept in practice, but let me highlight three positive examples of the implementation of the Strategic Concept at NATO.

When the war in Ukraine started, we started having regular updates and assessments of the war. In the beginning, there was no gender perspective in the analysis. It became clear that we are creating a gap and missing something. Then, I got a seat at the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and briefed the Secretary General and the Ambassadors on the gender analysis of the situation in Ukraine. We cannot ignore the impact on half of the population. More and more now, the intelligence is integrating a gender perspective. We also see more references in the political and operational analysis. This shows that we are slowly changing the way we work. I hope that soon, there will be no need for me to sit at the table because everyone will have changed their way of working. This is why the position of SGSR exists: to guide others and to show the way of properly integrating a gender perspective.

Another positive example was the inclusion of WPS, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) and HS considerations/modules in the training Allies are offering for Ukrainian armed forces in different countries.

Finally, we are now looking into how we can have a gender-sensitive response and support through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine. One example of this is that uniforms need to be adapted to fit women's bodies, which the Defence Minister of Ukraine also highlighted. Using NATO as a political platform is important for conveying the message that we support Ukraine, especially in the reconstruction and recovery phase, which will include a gender perspective. We tend to first solve problems and later bring in a gender perspective. I believe we need to have gendered budgeting from now on. The planning has to be done in the right way.

Let me finish by quoting the SG's words during his visit to Kyiv "Ukraine's rightful place is in the Euro-Atlantic family. Ukraine's rightful place is in NATO. And over time, our support will help to make this possible. NATO stands with you today, tomorrow, and for as long as it takes."

## *1 x 3 = 27... The “triple effect” to achieve Equality*

*A product as the result of an accomplished goal, and not of a miscalculation<sup>2</sup>*

### **Nuno Lemos Pires**

*National Defence Policy Director*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2023 we celebrated the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Carnation Revolution”, the peaceful military coup d’état of 1974, led by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), which overthrew Salazar’s dictatorship and paved the way for a consolidated democracy in Portugal. The Carnation Revolution prompted significant transformations in the Portuguese society, resulting in numerous changes in different areas, from politics to diplomacy passing through culture and economy. In particular, we witnessed multiple improvements in women’s rights, such as:

- Universal suffrage. Women obtain the full legal right to vote<sup>3</sup>.
- Women get access to new professions (diplomacy, military, judiciary).
- Various professions are no longer restricted to certain gender rules (Nursing, for instance, was almost exclusively reserved to single women, childless, or widows).
- Married women are now allowed to travel freely without having to ask for an authorization from their husbands.
- Boys and girls are no longer separated in the playground.
- The end of the gender pay gap between men and women, which was a general practice and almost “mandatory”.
- Female emancipation.

Forty-nine years after the coup, Portugal is a country where women’s rights have progressed substantially, in line with the main targets of the “Gender Equality and Women’s

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<sup>2</sup> Extended version of a communication presented in the International Seminar “The War in Ukraine from a gender perspective”, conducted on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, at the Institute of National Defence, in Lisbon, Portugal. For this communication, the author had the support of Brigadier General Ana Baltazar, Colonel António Paradelo, Lieutenant Colonel Cristina Fachada and PhD candidate Joana Lopes, to whom he addresses, once again, his heartfelt thanks.

<sup>3</sup> There are two important developments regarding women’s right to vote in Portugal. First: Carolina Beatriz Ângelo, medical surgeon, is the first woman to vote in Portugal. By exploring some loopholes of the law at the time - as the fact it did not explicitly mention gender - she managed to vote in the first elections (1911) after the fall of the monarchy. However, in 1913, the law was modified to restrict the right only to male citizens. Second: During Portugal’s military dictatorship (1926-1933), in 1931, women were given the right to vote but not on the same terms as men. Therefore, it is only after the 25<sup>th</sup> of April coup that women obtain the full right to vote.

Empowerment” focus area of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG).

*Equality* constitutes an essential vector to promote a fair, responsible, credible, and prosperous society. Women and men have the same rights and responsibilities, and all, without exception, must have the same opportunities and the same power to, based on human rights and democracy, intervene in decision-making that shapes national and international policy.

The *principle of equality* is at the heart of European and Euro-Atlantic values, well established in national and international frameworks. Portugal is a party to various international legal instruments addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment, across different multilateral organisations, including NATO, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP). Promoting a stronger involvement of civil society, and empowering both genders in the matters of national security and defence, is a key strategic line of our National Defence policy. Portugal stands committed to address the meaningful participation of women in peacemaking. The “National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030 - Portugal + Igual” is the main political reference for the advancement of gender equality. Within this framework, Portugal has adopted various action plans to push forward the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS), such as the “National Defence Action Plan for Equality 2022-2025”.

This framework is at the core basis of my communication, entitled “ $1 \times 3 = 27$  ... The ‘triple effect’ to achieve Equality”. My main purpose is to show that this mathematical operation is “a product as the result of an accomplished goal, and not of a miscalculation”. But how? Let me start with *two considerations*.

The *first consideration* concerns to the multiplication operation ( $1 \times 3$ ) in *Equality*. There are two important factors to consider:

- The first factor is the multiplier (number 1), which corresponds to *Equality*. The number 1 refers to the ***increase in the number of women in missions/operations*** (as in the case of Overseas Missions and Operations [FND], Defence Attachés [ADIDEF], Defence Capacity Building [CDD], among others). This is associated with the promotion of retention mechanisms for these military personnel, which leads to successful operations.



- The second factor is the multiplicand (number 3). This is reflected in three direct outcomes which, to a certain extent, we can perceive as “spill-over” or “mirror” effects. Specifically, a/an:
  - *Increase in the number of military women*, both nationally (in Portugal) and internationally. Through, for example, an image of credibility, great effectiveness across borders, complemented by careful and planned communication. Therefore, it is likely that there will be an increase:
    - In recruitment and/or retention.
    - In the participation of this workforce in FNDs, etc.
    - In Defence literacy.
  - *Greater effect of the role of women (in the Armed Forces)*, for instance reflected:
    - In our external National Defence projection, that is, how other Armed Forces perceive us as a credible partner in missions and operations. Our Portuguese military woman are internationally recognised as strong assets, representing an added value to our Forces and for the success of the operations.
    - In blurring and/or demystifying the idea that there are positions/jobs exclusively designated to males and to females.
  - *Better perception of the role of women by the societies where the missions take place*. For example, in societies that prohibit access to women in many areas of action (such as the involvement in the Armed Forces), promoting gender equality is vital, essential to all parties, which also contributes to upholding the principles and norms of international law.

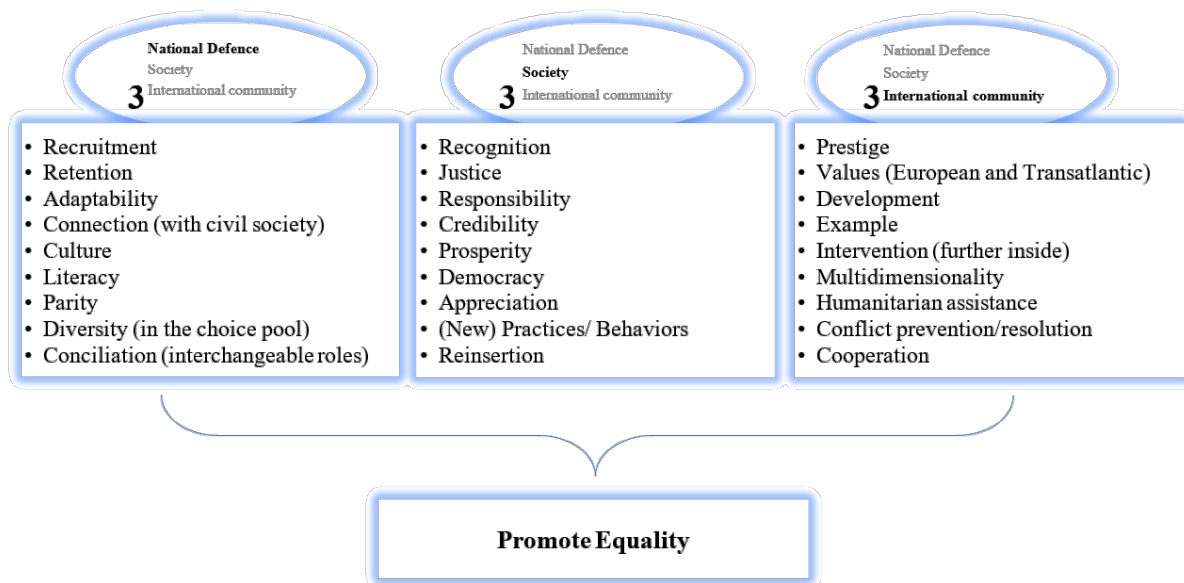
The *second consideration* concerns the ***total 27, resulting from the product 1 x 3 (1 x 3 = 27)***. This mathematical operation results in three *joint (or final) outcomes*, with direct consequences in the spheres of:

- National Defence, seen as a whole, operating in an integrated and collaborative manner, guided by different principles:
  - *Involvement* (direct and effective) of all employees.
    - *Commitment*, on the part of hierarchical managers.
    - *Exemplarity*, in terms of internal organization and in relation to Government institutions/bodies, and to international interlocutors.
    - *Reinforcement* (through management and middle management) of the conciliation between professional, personal, and family life, between men and women, through measures such as the practice of continuous working hours,

the enjoyment of parental leave, support for descendant family members or ascendants, and/or the use of teleworking.

- Society (in general). We aim to promote a military organizational culture, where women and men have equal access in the various spheres of action. In other words, in the Armed Forces, we aim to promote the following practices:
  - Promote parity between men and women, under equal circumstances, in access to FND, international missions, CDD, ADIDEF and other positions/missions.
  - Ensure prior specific training in Gender Perspective Integration to the personnel appointed to international positions, like what has already been done in the preparation of military personnel for international positions (as in the case of the FND and ADIDEF).
  - Uphold the United Nations, NATO and EU guidelines on WPS and greater female representation in military missions.
  - Promote access, on equal terms, to any type of function regardless of gender.
  - Contribute to fulfil the *National Defence Action Plan for Equality* and propose new actions perceived as relevant.
  - Encourage the participation of women in meetings, seminars, and cooperation actions in the field of Defence.
- International community. Our strategic narrative of empowerment can also have a spill over effect in the international community, namely in our partners and allies. For example – and always observing the *principle of parity (between men and women) in equal circumstances* –, the placement of military women in positions “historically” held by men (e.g., ADIDEF) contributes to spreading a message of tolerance, recognition, trust, development, modernity, empowerment, recognition of capabilities and change in the organizational culture of the Armed Forces. By entrusting a cooperative environment in the Armed Forces, based on gender equality, we can promote a change in the international realm, not only by safeguarding the values we uphold the most in our Defence policy, but also by setting an example beyond borders.

The result, twenty-seven, is translated into the **27 achievements/objectives/end states** shown in Figure 1.



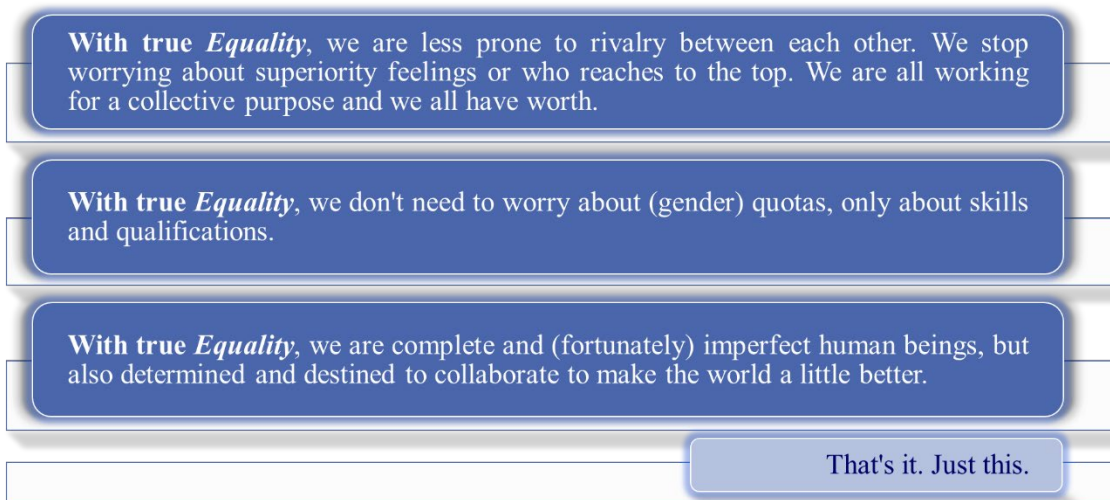
**Figure 1 – 27 achievements/objectives/end states that promote *Equality***

*Equality* is fundamentally what has been established in our most structuring legislative document, the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (adopted in 1976, two years after the Revolution of 1974). Its article 13 states that:

- “1. All citizens have the same social dignity and are equal before the law.
2. No one may be privileged, benefited, harmed, deprived of any right or exempt from any duty due to ancestry, sex, race, language, territory of origin, religion, political or ideological convictions, education, economic situation, social condition, or sexual orientation.”

These are a set of legislative rules that reflect a democratic principle, equality, which, however, are still far-fetched in many areas of the globe - including Portugal.

Going back to the title formula, mind that  $1 \times 3 = 27$  is actually correct. Allow me some leeway and please accept that, in this case, we are going beyond normal math. Here, the “1”, is way more than a simple unit. It means “Equality” and, as such, it works to raise the “3” next to it to its 3<sup>rd</sup> power. The end result equals  $1 \times 3^3 = 27$  and stresses the key messages of Figure 2.



**Figure 2 – Key messages concerning *Equality***

To sum up, one last thought.

One can imagine that many of you have silently questioned the theme of this Symposium: *Why is it important to recall the achievements of the Carnation Revolution? Why is it important to discuss, now, equality and gender empowerment?*

And I do understand. I also think that, at first sight, it does not make any sense. But, believe me, it does.

**Equality** is the fundamental key to guaranteeing the preservation of our fundamental values and the human species. Thus, despite the historical conquests and the successes already achieved, it is important to continue to reflect on what we can do to improve the current situation, especially in the Defence area, and to continue to talk about rights, responsibilities, empowerment, and *equality*. The only way to make a *Democratic society* accountable to future generations.

## **Expert Panel**

### **“The Gender Perspective of the War in Ukraine – Preliminary Lessons”**

## The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on NATO's Understanding of a Gender Perspective

**Dr. Katharine A. M. Wright**

*Senior Lecturer in International Politics at Newcastle University [www.kamwright.com](http://www.kamwright.com)*

In this intervention, I consider if, and how, the Russia-Ukraine War is changing NATO's understanding of a gender perspective. In so doing, I argue a gender perspective is essential for NATO to deploy in not only understanding, but also responding to Russia's aggression and supporting Ukraine. It builds on over a decade of research focused on NATO's engagement with Women, Peace and Security and with a gender perspective, through which I have seen first-hand how NATO's understanding of a gender perspective has evolved with the Alliance's priorities and as broader geopolitical realities have shifted.

In light of the new NATO Strategic Concept adopted in 2022 in Madrid and which prioritises Women, Peace and Security for the first time and reinforces gender equality as a NATO value, there is an opportunity for NATO to fully deploy a gender perspective, including in its response to the Russia-Ukraine war (Morais, Turner and Wright, 2022).

### What is a gender perspective?

A gender perspective is a tool, a key to unlock and fully understand any given situation. It stems from the Women, Peace and Security agenda which draws attention to women as agents (rather than victims) in conflict – but of course – it concerns not just women, but people of all genders.

To understand what a gender perspective means in the Russia-Ukraine war, we need to consider a couple of key questions, first, where are the women? In focusing on women, we are not neglecting men, but often women are less visible so we need to be conscious in looking for them. Actively looking for women also shows where the men are and what they are doing (Enloe, 2014).

In looking for the women, we also need to acknowledge that they are far from just victims, but – in the case of Ukraine - that women demonstrate considerable agency in resisting and responding to the invasion (Mathers and Kvit, 2022). Women are far from passive recipients in conflict and post-conflict situations (Turner and Swaine, 2023).

Second, we also need to consider what work is gender doing here. How for example are masculinities and femininities invoked in different situations, and to whose benefit and detriment?

### **How has NATO engaged with a gender perspective to date?**

To fully understand and appreciate how NATO's understanding of a gender perspective might be changed by the war in Ukraine, and Russia's invasion, we need to also consider how it has already evolved. It was first understood through NATO's operations in Afghanistan – where a gender perspective became a force multiplier, essential for understanding and responding to the situation, including through the deployment of Female Engagement Teams (Keally McBride and Wibben, 2012; Wright, 2016).

NATO has also understood the value of a gender perspective for public diplomacy and strategic communication. Specifically, the value it provides in enabling the communication of key messages to the whole population (Wright, 2019; Hedling, Edenborg and Strand, 2022). The Alliance used Angelina Jolie's high-profile visit in 2018 to better communicate its values and purpose to an audience not usually so engaged with NATO's work as a defence alliance, women (Wright and Bergman Rosamond, 2021).

### **The impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on a gender perspective**

There are four elements in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war which have the potential to impact NATO's understanding of a gender perspective. I will highlight and provide an overview of them here, but my fellow contributors have the expertise to unpack these issues further in more detail. These are also aspects NATO has discussed at the most recent NATO Committee on Gender Perspective Conference (NCGP) in October 2022 (NATO, 2022).

First, Women, Peace and Security, and specifically a gender perspective, has been an important building block of NATO's partnership with Ukraine since 2014 (Wright, Hurley and Gil Ruiz, 2019; O'Sullivan, 2019). In terms of supporting the capacity building of Ukraine's armed forces and the implementation of Women, Peace and Security. Ukraine is not unique here, and NATO has supported a number of partners on this agenda (Wright, 2016).

Second, the way the war is being waged by Russia is deeply gendered both on the ground in Ukraine, for example through the use of conflict-related sexual violence by Russian forces (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

But also, more broadly as an attack on Western values, including freedom, justice, democracy, and tellingly - gender equality through the promotion of 'traditional family values' (Cooper-Cunningham, 2022; Hedling, Edenborg and Strand, 2022).

Relatedly, on a strategic level, NATO has had to prioritise a gender perspective in its response to Russian disinformation, which often exploits gender to target men and women differently (Edenborg, 2021).

Finally, in NATO's support for Ukraine we also need to consider a gender perspective in understanding how the war is impacting lives on the ground both in the present, during the conflict, and also going forward in a post-conflict society. Here a gender perspective involves centring, supporting, listening to and acting on the concerns of Ukrainian women on the ground in civil society who we know are doing a lot of the heavy lifting in supporting their communities and providing vital services. They are far from passive victims, but active responders to the Russian invasion (Mathers and Kvit, 2022).

Moreover, we also need to acknowledge that the gendered nature of the conflict in Ukraine means women have been elevated to political leadership positions and become an often visible voice. And while this is welcome, implementing a gender perspective means reaching out to those women on the ground too without access to traditional avenues of power, and acknowledging women are far from a homogenous group – one women's experience will be different from another's, which is why we need to speak to women positioned at all levels, and in all aspects of society (O'Sullivan, 2022; Tondo, 2022; Tsymbalyuk *et al.*, 2022). NATO has the mechanism to do this through the Civil Society Advisory Panel on Women, Peace and Security, but this does not preclude allies and other NATO entities from reaching out in their own capacity (Wright, 2023).

### **Conclusions: towards the NATO Summit**

The elevation of Women, Peace and Security to the NATO Strategic Concept demonstrates NATO's commitment to implementing a gender perspective and provides an opportunity for the Alliance to invest further to fully understand how the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has impacted a gender perspective.

The contributions to the IDN seminar and in this volume provide an important part of that conversation, and something NATO should prioritise further in the run-up to the next summit, this July. First and foremost through listening to, and hearing, the voices of Ukrainian women on the ground, doing the heavy lifting (not just the women diplomats and politicians), specifically through centring and prioritising their needs in NATO's support for Ukraine. However uncomfortable that might be.



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## The Importance of Gender Perspective for Cognitive Superiority and Layered Resilience: Preliminary Lessons from Ukraine

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### Introduction

Displaying the importance of being aware of gender perspective in relation to armed conflict is not new. However, a significant view that the aggression towards Ukraine is highlighting is the importance of how influence and strategic advantage can be exploited making use of gender perspective. The purpose of this short paper is to provide examples of gender-related events coming from Ukraine, show how the Ukrainians are responding to these matters, and reflect on how NATO can benefit from gender-related lessons in order to support the readiness of our Alliance.

### NATO Concepts

In recent times, the transformational side of NATO is developing its Warfare Development Agenda, which is a 20-year outlook for new strategic thinking.

This agenda has five Warfare Development Imperatives and the gender-related experiences in Ukraine are informing two of those imperatives, namely Cognitive Superiority and Layered Resilience.

On the one hand, Cognitive Superiority is the ability to develop a deep understanding of oneself and of potential adversaries, which is imperative to understanding if and how adversaries shape the security environment in their favour while contesting NATO and its values.

On the other hand, Layered Resilience ensures the Alliance's capacity to sustain long-term competition with potential adversaries by anticipating, absorbing and adapting to strategic shock or surprise.

### On Cognitive Superiority

Russia's perception of the gender construct in society usually allocates a secondary role for women, especially within their Military Instrument of Power. As an example, the motto for the latest recruitment advertisements by Russia to join the armed forces is "*Be a man*" and effectively does not consider the participation of women.

Ukraine is exploiting the Russian difference in gender construct by contesting the narratives that show how Russia is effectively undermining the overall capacity of half of its population.

At the same time, Ukraine is projecting a narrative to ensure that the entire Ukrainian Armed Forces, women and men, are responsible for defending its sovereign territory.

Another example relates to how Russia has referred to the conscripts that fled the country after the partial mobilisation in September 2022. The Russian communication campaign against those who fled was focused around the concept “*the boys have left but the men have stayed*”. Ukraine masterly exploited these Russian messages reassuring that, in the case of Ukraine, no undermining comparative messages were tolerated within the Ukrainian Armed Forces and its conscription efforts.

Additionally, it is imperative to see how Ukraine is conducting stakeholder analysis from a gender perspective and has identified resistance groups within Russia that are against the war, such as the Feminist Anti-War Resistance Group or the “Mothers of Russian Soldiers” group and has exploited these groups to Ukraine’s advantage.

Finally, Russia has weaponized gender and refugees to legitimize its campaign *vis-a-vis* its own population. One of the Russian information campaigns prior to the invasion was titled “*Save the Donbas Children*” and had the objective of portraying Russia as the guardian of traditional, patriarchal values in opposition to an allegedly corrupt and decadent West, including Ukraine. Ukrainians were skilful in portraying that these types of Russian campaigns were to the detriment of the rights of women and counter these narratives by highlighting that Russia effectively categorizes women as a marginalized group.

### **On Layered Resilience**

Full-scale warfare, as is the case in Ukraine, has demonstrated the very high reliance of the Military Instrument of Power on the civil resilience layer. This is particularly the case in response to the adversaries’ malicious use of military means to undermine the morale of the civilian population by eroding the comfort tissue of basic needs, such as the targeting of the energy infrastructure.

As Ukrainians have learned, responses to these attacks are mostly conducted by the civil sector and must be planned, resourced, and executed taking into account the needs of different gender and age groups.

A major element to be taken into account for layered resilience is the psychological sphere of one’s own population. Russia has been making conscious and strategic use of conflict-related sexual violence to undermine the morale of the Ukrainian population.

Additionally, for longer-lasting conflicts, societal support is a key element for perseverance. Within the societal support, it is of paramount importance to have sex- and age-disaggregated

data in order for the military and civil society to adequately nurture the different elements of the civilian society to be able to sustain support for the military efforts. Civil service groups in Ukraine are trying to provide adequate support to the civilian population based on the differences in gender and age of the people that are in need.

Finally, interesting views are being analysed, from a gender perspective, on how mobilisation and conscription laws are thought about in Russia and in Ukraine. Although in different degrees, mobilisation and conscription laws are mostly targeted at the male population; there continues to be a view that men are expected to fight, even in cases without the proper military training.

### **Conclusions**

The situation in Ukraine is allowing preliminary lessons to be drawn from a gender perspective and is giving NATO the opportunity to learn and adapt from these matters.

Overall, NATO is learning to perceive the importance that gender perspective has in practical terms within an evolving conflict and how gender perspective can be exploited to achieve an advantage.

For Cognitive Superiority, NATO is learning to gather awareness of how the Russian gender-related narrative is being exploited by Ukraine. Additionally, NATO is learning to acquire a deeper and broader understanding of Russian gender-related constructs, and is learning to be prepared to integrate a gender perspective in NATO's long-term military strategic shaping.

For layered resilience, NATO should assume that, unfortunately, malicious state actors make calculated use of targeting civilian infrastructure and make conscious use of conflict-related sexual violence to undermine the psychological morale of the civilian population. Therefore, proper military and civil planning, resourcing and executing of responses to attacks on civil infrastructure or civilians must integrate gender perspective. Additionally, fostering and ensuring sex- and age-disaggregated data is paramount for the adequate planning of resilience-related work strands and, specifically, to ensure adequate societal support for perseverance efforts.

Finally, in order to ensure effective layered resilience, efforts should be done to analyse how mobilisation and conscription laws are thought about within the different NATO nations and understand if they are fitted to anticipate and adapt to the warfare and social realities we are currently facing.

Drawing from preliminary lessons from Ukraine will allow for an adequate and informed integration of gender perspective for Cognitive Superiority and Layered Resilience. This, in turn, will benefit NATO and Allies in anticipating, adapting and contesting any strategic competitor.

## Russia, Gender and the War in Ukraine

**Jenny Mathers**

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### Introduction

Gender is central to the way that Russia's President Vladimir Putin understands the war in Ukraine. Ideas about men and women and the roles that they should play in society and politics, masculinity and femininity and the dynamics of power that determine their relationship to each other all contribute to the way that Russia's senior officials and the state-controlled Russian media present Moscow's interests in Ukraine. Ideas about gender also shape a key narrative that the Kremlin uses to justify both the Russian mass invasion that began in February 2022 as well as the Russian military intervention in Ukraine that has been ongoing since 2014.

At the heart of this narrative is the idea that Russia is engaged in a war of values against the West, which it is fighting in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> This is based on the claim that Russia is a champion of traditional family values, or in other words, the appropriate gendered order that Russian society – and, by extension, any society – should live by.

An important component of Russia's gendered narrative of the war in Ukraine is that the war is just one dimension of Moscow's fight against the unnatural and degenerate attitudes and behaviour that dominate and define life in the West and that have also infected Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Ukraine and the "collective West", to use the phrasing adopted by Russian officials and the state-controlled media, are depicted as lacking a moral compass: not understanding the difference between right and wrong or, perhaps, understanding that difference but choosing what is wrong over what is right.

This gendered narrative is aimed not only at domestic audiences in Russia, but also at the wider world, with Moscow staking a claim to be the international champion of family values.<sup>6</sup> This message resonates in parts of the Global South that have very socially conservative, often very religious, leaders and societies. It has also been welcomed with enthusiasm in parts of Europe and North America, especially among socially and politically conservative communities, political parties and leaders, who use culture wars as a way of attaining and

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<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Stoner, "The Putin Myth", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 34, Number 2 (2023): 5-18.

<sup>5</sup> Emil Edenborg, "Putin's Anti-Gay War on Ukraine", *Boston Review*, 14 March 2022. Available at <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/putins-anti-gay-war-on-ukraine/> Accessed 11 June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Emil Edenborg, "Homophobia as Geopolitics: 'Traditional Values' and the Negotiation of Russia's Place in the World" in *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Jon Mulholland, Nicola Montagna and Erin Sanders-McDonagh (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 67-87.

holding onto political power, such as Victor Orban's Hungary and the extreme right of the Republican Party in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The presentation of Russia as a defender of the family and conservative social practices is one of Moscow's few successful attempts to exercise soft power, along with the image of Russia as a defender of the idea of state sovereignty, and as an opponent of imperialism and the West's economic exploitation and political manipulation of the Global South.

### **Putin and the Securitisation of Gender**

Putin's Russia has developed and nurtured the idea that "unnatural" gender relations are in fact a threat to Russia's sovereignty, its national identity and the security of the state and its citizens, posing a danger to a distinctively Russian way of life and the existence of Russia itself. This securitisation<sup>8</sup> of gender – the depiction of certain gendered behaviours and identities as posing existential threats to Russia's security – has been facilitated by the close relationship between the state and political elites, including Vladimir Putin, and the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>9</sup>

Russia's efforts to depict Ukraine and the West as seeking to undermine traditional family values are, to a large extent, shorthand for Moscow's opposition to the accepted presence of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer) people. It reflects a refusal on the part of the Russian state and its representatives and spokespeople to acknowledge that lesbians, gays, bisexual, trans and queer people have human rights, and the creation of an increasingly hostile legal and social environment for the LGBTQ community within Russia.

Many of the legal protections for Russian citizens regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity that were introduced during the 1990s and early 2000s have been reversed as Vladimir Putin's regime has consolidated its grip on power, with this process accelerating since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012. In 2013 a new law was passed that banned "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" among minors.<sup>10</sup> Although the legislation was framed as protecting children from harmful influences, the vagueness of the language used in these laws (including the lack of a clear definition of homosexual propaganda) has

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<sup>7</sup> Lionel Beehner and Thomas Sherlock, "Putin in Trying to Turn Ukraine into a Culture War", *Foreign Policy*, 9 September 2022. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/09/putin-russia-ukraine-culture-war-conservative-values/> Accessed 11 June 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Fernando G. Nunez-Mietz, "Resisting human rights through securitization: Russia and Hungary against LGBT rights", *Journal of Human Rights*, Volume 18, Number 5 (2018): 543-563.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Elder, "Russia passes law banning gay 'propaganda'", *The Guardian* 11 June 2013. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/russia-law-banning-gay-propaganda> Accessed 11 June 2023.



given the courts a great deal of latitude for interpretation.<sup>11</sup> In practice, individuals, groups or media outlets that provide information about gay rights have been prosecuted and fined, with organisations subject to temporary closure.<sup>12</sup> An amendment to Russia's constitution approved by referendum in 2020 specifies that marriage is a union between a man and a woman,<sup>13</sup> while in 2022 further legislation was introduced that effectively bans sharing any kind of positive or neutral information about LGBTQ people or publicly displaying non-heterosexual orientations.<sup>14</sup>

Moscow's emphasis on upholding a traditional, socially-conservative gendered order means that it is important to include feminists in those categories of people who are regarded by Russian officials as degenerate and unnatural. Feminists are depicted as women who have lost sight of their real purpose in life, which is to be feminine and beautiful, to marry and become mothers and grandmothers, and to devote themselves to their families. Feminists, by contrast, are depicted as women who behave in ways that are irrational, unnatural and inappropriate and, indeed, traitorous. According to Oleg Matveychev, a member of the political party United Russia and an elected representative of the Russian State Duma (parliament),

Our feminists are simply agents of the West. They are engaged in the destruction of traditional values, their activities are contrary to the president's decree on the support of traditional values. They are for divorce, childlessness, and abortion. They are acting against the demographic policy of the Russian Federation.<sup>15</sup>

In 2023, Matveychev introduced legislation that would designate feminism an extremist ideology, influenced, perhaps, by the fact that one of the most active groups organising against the war inside Russia is the Feminist Anti-War Resistance.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cai Wilkinson, "Putting 'Traditional Values' Into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia", *Journal of Human Rights*, Volume 13, Number 3 (2014): 363-379.

<sup>12</sup> Elder, "Russia passes law banning gay 'propaganda'".

<sup>13</sup> "Russia Moves to Ban Gay Marriage", *The Moscow Times*, 15 July 2020. Available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/07/15/spotify-expands-to-russia-and-eastern-europe-a70879> Accessed 11 June 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Russia: Expanded 'Gay Propaganda' Ban Progresses Toward Law", 25 November 2022. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/25/russia-expanded-gay-propaganda-ban-progresses-toward-law> Accessed 11 June 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Allison Quinn, "All Feminists to be Officially Designated 'Extremists' Under Proposed Russian Law", *The Daily Beast* 4 April 2023. Available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/all-feminists-to-be-officially-designated-extremists-under-proposed-russian-law> Accessed 11 June 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Andrey Serafimov, "Russia's women are fighting back against the war in Ukraine", *openDemocracy*, 4 October 2022. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-feminist-resistance-to-ukraine-war/> Accessed 11 June 2023

## Men, Women and War

Olga Oliker of the International Crisis Group has described Putin's Russia as "embracing toxic masculinity as a core value",<sup>17</sup> which succinctly captures another important aspect of Russia's use of gender in Ukraine: the ways that particular forms of masculinity are being employed to justify and even to celebrate Moscow's invasion and brutal, ruthless behaviour. Masculinity is the key to the way that Putin sees himself, personally and as a leader, and by extension the way that he sees Russia as a state – and this view is shared by other Russian officials.<sup>18</sup> An important component in the narrative of Putin's significance as a leader is that he, a strong and masculine figure, brought Russia out of a period of humiliation: the 1990s, when Russia was weak and taken advantage of by the West. According to this logic, if Russia is to avoid falling back into the ways of the 1990s, then the state itself must be more like Putin: it must be tough and masculine and behave like a real man.<sup>19</sup> This involves belligerence towards those states that Russia regards as its enemies (e.g., the West) and those that lie within its sphere of influence, especially states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. A key component of this belligerent behaviour involves the threat and the use of military force to take and keep what Russia wants, or what Moscow claims belongs to Russia.

One of the ways that Russia's state masculinity reveals itself is in decisions and representations about who should participate in this war. A Russian military recruiting video circulating on social media in the spring of 2023 illustrates this point very clearly. The video depicts three Russian men doing ordinary jobs in the civilian economy and suggests that these are not the jobs that they dream of doing, and they are certainly not jobs that are suitable for real men. It then shows these same men wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons, bluntly telling them (and men in the audience), "You're a real man. Be one."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the way to be a real Russian man and fulfil your purpose in life is to become a soldier.

Despite a real crisis of recruitment and serious shortages of Russian military personnel as a direct result of the war in Ukraine, there is almost no interest in increasing the number of women who serve in the armed forces. Neither the recruitment campaigns that seek to

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<sup>17</sup> Olga Oliker, "Fighting While Female: How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine", *Foreign Affairs*, 21 November 2022. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/fighting-while-female> Accessed 11 June 2023

<sup>18</sup> Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova, "The Remasculinization of Russia?: Gender, Nationalism and the Legitimation of Power under Vladimir Putin", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Volume 61, Number 2 (2014): 23-35.

<sup>20</sup> "Russian military encourages 'real men' to step forward in recruitment ad", *NBC News* channel on YouTube. Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_tm6\\_-mOy8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_tm6_-mOy8) Accessed 11 June 2023.

encourage volunteers nor the partial mobilisation that Putin announced in September 2022 have targeted women as possible soldiers. A very small number of women have been mobilised, mainly medics, and a small proportion of women are among those joining voluntarily, but the overwhelming emphasis has been on getting men into uniforms and onto the front lines.

The appropriate space for Russia's women in official depictions of this war is narrow, marginalised and very stereotypically feminine. If Russia's men become their true selves through military service, then Russia's women display their womanliness through their passivity. The job of the mother, wife, sister or daughter of a soldier is to express support and pride in her man's willingness to do his duty, to wait for him to return from the war and to mourn his loss if he is killed in action. A typical example of state-sanctioned imagery of Russia's women is a series of carefully-posed photographs of Russia's war widows draped in their husband's military uniform jackets and holding their medals, which has been circulating on Russian social media.

During the Soviet war in Afghanistan and Russia's wars in Chechnya in the 1990s and early 2000s, soldiers' mothers proved to be a powerful force. They organised themselves into a network of grassroots civil society groups to put pressure on Russia's government and the Ministry of Defence to end the war and bring their sons home. But although Russia's soldiers' mothers have not been prominent in public campaigns against the war in Ukraine, the state-controlled media has almost entirely written them out of reports about this war. The phrase "soldiers' mothers" is almost never mentioned and instead a new phrase is being used: "families of military servicemen". This, we believe, reflects the fact that soldiers' mothers were historically troublesome and disruptive, challenging the state and fighting for the rights of conscripts. On the rare occasions when they are mentioned, the mothers and wives of soldiers are described as engaged in stereotypically feminised acts, such as knitting socks for soldiers at the front.

## Conclusions

Russia is using gender to depict its decisions and actions in the war in Ukraine as necessary, normal and logical. This is, in fact, one of the most powerful aspects of gender: it makes social relations, which are very carefully constructed and maintained through constant effort, appear to be natural and unchangeable.<sup>21</sup> And once the existence of unequal power relations

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<sup>21</sup> Carol Cohn, "Women and Wars: Toward a Conceptual Framework" in *Women and Wars*, edited by Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 17-34.

based on gender is accepted between categories of people (men versus women, straight versus gay), it becomes much more difficult to question other ways of thinking and acting that follow, such as the division of wartime roles between men and women, or the idea that a state has to be tough and strong and use military force to be respected in the world.

Putin and other Russian policymakers use gender as a way of explaining how they see the Russian state and society, how they see the enemy, and also how they see the future. They use gender to describe the way that they believe the world should be organised, and the way that it would be organised if Russia were in control.

Russia uses gender to marginalise and de-humanise individuals, communities and nations, whether that is LGBTQ individuals whose rights are denied, women who refuse to accept a subordinate place in society, or a country and a nation, such as Ukraine, which has embraced values such as democracy, tolerance and human rights.

Russia's gendered narrative of the war in Ukraine is a valuable soft power tool and is one of the few examples of Moscow successfully presenting itself as attractive to some audiences in the international community. It suits the political purposes of some far-right and ultra-conservative figures to hold up Russia as the symbol of an imaginary world where men and women know their places and keep to them, and there is no need to respect the human rights of LGBTQ people or others who are not "like us". But this world is imaginary; it does not reflect the reality of everyday life, even in Russia itself.

Efforts to appeal to masculinity as a way of attracting Russian men to join the armed forces has not been effective. Instead, the Ministry of Defence has been offering material incentives to persuade men to leave their civilian lives for the dangerous and difficult job of fighting in Ukraine. These incentives include offering five times the average salary, short-term contracts and significant benefits to families of soldiers killed in the war. And even then, Russia was unable to recruit sufficient soldiers to fill the gaps in the ranks, as Putin's partial mobilisation in September 2022 demonstrated. And even the demand to respond to the call of the state to do their duty was not sufficient to persuade some men to put on a military uniform: it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Russian men fled overseas to avoid being mobilised for war.<sup>22</sup>

The image of Russia as a bastion of traditional family values is also misleading. Vladimir Putin himself is divorced and has been the subject of persistent rumours over many years about extramarital affairs and fathering children born out of wedlock. Even the state's own

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<sup>22</sup> "Factbox: Where have Russians been fleeing to since mobilisation began?" *Reuters*, 6 October 2022. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/where-have-russians-been-fleeing-since-mobilisation-began-2022-10-06/> Accessed 11 June 2023.

rhetoric replaces references to soldiers' mothers (and their fathers) with an emphasis on the material support and moral guidance that the state provides to soldiers. A man's highest duty and purpose comes in the form of military service, which is provided by the state. The most important relationship that Moscow wants soldiers to have, it appears, is not with their own families, but with the Russian state itself.

The image of the passive Russian woman, sitting at home and waiting patiently for her soldier husband or son to return from the war, and mourning his loss if he does not, also only reveals a small part of the real story. In practice, when Russia's men go to war in Ukraine, it is the women in their households who hold their families together, often taking on additional paid employment as well as looking after children and other family members. Wives and mothers have also become the advocates for ordinary Russian soldiers, writing letters and recording videos pleading with the Ministry of Defence to provide the men with adequate training and equipment.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, Russia's gendered narrative about the war in Ukraine may prove to be self-defeating, as well as highly misleading. By focusing so heavily on men as the appropriate soldiers, Moscow is denying itself a potentially important human resource in its war effort: women. In sharp contrast to Ukraine, which has removed legal obstacles to women joining and serving in the armed forces, and whose political and military leaders acknowledge women's presence in the ranks and their contributions to the war, Russia is turning its back on a demographic that proved crucial to the Soviet Union's ability to defeat Nazi Germany in the Second World War.

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<sup>23</sup> Jennifer Mathers and Natasha Danilova, "Ukraine war: why Russian soldiers' mothers aren't demonstrating the strong opposition they have in previous conflicts", *The Conversation* 6 January 2023. Available at <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-why-russian-soldiers-mothers-arent-demonstrating-the-strong-opposition-they-have-in-previous-conflicts-196605> Accessed 11 June 2023.

## Olena Suslova

*Founder at Women's Information Consultative Center*

The year we have lived brought us, Ukrainians, many challenges, mainly those that we have never planned to face in our lives. Such as having to leave our homes and organize them in new places, running to shelters during the alarms and conducting training there, losing friends, colleagues, civilians, and military every day and communicating with Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) survivors, and many, many more.

This year taught us many skills that we have never planned to use, such as making trench candles and weaving protective nets for the army, living without light, heat and water and keeping on working full time during all these days.

The challenges and skills we acquired made us stronger and gave us new perspectives, including gender perspectives.

The 1325 Resolution pillars: prevention, participation, protection, and reconciliation help to analyze the past year through a gender lens and gender perspectives.

It also gave us the understanding of what we should do next and how.

Hybrid threats identification, emotional security, the evolving concept of security are not “just values” – they are the soft tools of security. The gender perspective of early warning is about the **prevention**.

For a systematic understanding of the issues related to and ways of overcoming crises, it is important to consider gender as a crosscutting component<sup>24</sup>.

For 13 years (before the beginning of the war and for 8 years during the war) research demonstrated the fact that gender-based violence keeps growing in Russia. The tolerance for it keeps growing as well, and the efforts of promoting this approach to other countries, in particular, Ukraine, but not only, are intensifying. As an example, the global campaign against the Istanbul convention. Instead of directly targeting the idea of defence from the violence they targeted so-called “gender threats to humanhood”.

CRSV, its forms and accompanying manifestations of violence are demonstrating the results of this policy. The approval of war rapes in Russian society, in particular, by women, is a true confirmation of the existence of these consequences.

It is important to analyse it and to plan the incorporation of a deep and multilateral gender perspective into all areas of security and defence in strategic, operational and tactical planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. And also, to develop power methods

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<sup>24</sup> Available at <https://ukraine-analytica.org/the-gender-dimension-of-conflicts/>

and tools of counteraction. Ukraine collected rich experience in this area and it is important to share it and to apply it broadly<sup>25</sup>.

The opposition to anti-gender hybrid Russian actions in Ukraine has turned into an influential factor in the general resilience of society. The cooperation between the Security Service of Ukraine and civil society on these issues plays an important role.

The rapid response to security needs of a different nature compared to previous years; the unprecedented operational development of the assistance mechanism for CRSV survivors is the demonstration of the consequences of such preparedness.

### **Civil-military cooperation – no militarization, colonial feminism – participation**

More than 40,000 women are serving in the Ukrainian army nowadays. In percentage, it is more than in many armies of the NATO member countries.

Encouraging women to serve in the military, changing conditions of service, developing gender policies in the security and defence sector, cooperation on gender issues between the military and feminist Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) - all this concerns the **participation** of women in peacebuilding processes.

However, in this aspect, we are having discussions with feminist communities from different countries, due to the fact that it becomes an occasion to accuse us, Ukrainian feminists, of promoting the militarization of the country.

But our position is different. The country has the right to protection. Women have the right to defend their country. Blaming us for what we do is the same as blaming a woman who is threatened with violence when she defends herself. When feminists argue otherwise, this, in our opinion, is a reflection of "colonial feminism," which considers the situation only from the position of a possible aggressor country.

What should we do? Explain, discuss and promote this position.

### **CRSV – is about protection**

I have already talked about the immediate response to these cases. Not complete, not comprehensive, not effective sometimes, yet, – but very quick. Our public organization has been working on this issue since 2015. The experience we collected demonstrated the existence of gaps associated with countering CRSV in general.

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<sup>25</sup> Available at [http://www.irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis\\_nbuv/cgiirbis\\_64.exe?I21DBN=LINK&P21DBN=UJRN&Z21ID=&S21REF=10&S21CNR=20&S21STN=1&S21FMT=ASP\\_meta&C21COM=S&2\\_S21P03=FILE=&2\\_S21STR=iblsd\\_2019\\_2\\_16](http://www.irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis_nbuv/cgiirbis_64.exe?I21DBN=LINK&P21DBN=UJRN&Z21ID=&S21REF=10&S21CNR=20&S21STN=1&S21FMT=ASP_meta&C21COM=S&2_S21P03=FILE=&2_S21STR=iblsd_2019_2_16)  
Available at <https://50vidsotkiv.org.ua/kateryna-levchenko-usi-antygenderni-ruhy-pidtrymuyut-ruskyj-mir/>  
Available at <https://wicc.net.ua/category/gendernyy-rozriz-konfliktiv>

And now we are able to see how this experience can be spread widely.

### **The recovery plan for Ukraine – reconciliation – support and monitoring**

Reconciliation is impossible without justice. Justice is impossible without a gender perspective. Reparations, since the transitional justice mechanism provides guarantees of non-repetition, should include some specific measures. And these measures should be included in the act of capitulation of Russia.

Guarantees of non-repetition should be developed taking into account the causes of sexual violence in order to effectively prevent it in the future.

Such policies will include the development and implementation of an adequate legal and institutional framework to prevent and counter sexual violence against women, girls, men and boys<sup>26</sup>.

We are suffering but we are not victims - we are survivors - feel the difference.

We think how to contribute to the results of previous lessons and turn them into a post-war restoration of Ukraine.

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<sup>26</sup> Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/814902?ln=en>



## **Closing Remarks by Marco Capitão Ferreira, *Portuguese Secretary of State for Defence***

First, I would like to underline the excellent work and the immense value of the discussions held here today, which allowed us to discuss and better understand a subject of the utmost importance.

As the Minister of National Defence often says, equality is more than a constitutional right. It must also be a collective purpose in a democratic context, allowing both men and women to be fully integrated in society with the same opportunities.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February of 2022 provided us with an invaluable opportunity to assess the ability to defend ourselves and the implications of a range of capabilities for modern warfare. As a consequence of this war, we are deep-diving into a vast ocean of technological development, with exponential discoveries in fields only matched by their disruptive potential.

Such discoveries must take into account Women, Peace and Security and gender perspective. These are key elements that must be included in our strategic response to an illegal war that is being fought not only in territorial and geographical terms, but which, fundamentally, constitutes an attack on our democratic values, such as individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law.

The constant threats to the way we decide to organize our society should also lead us to collectively discuss how to deter them.

Gender perspectives cannot be separated from these discussions. The way they have impacted the ongoing war must be taken into consideration when assessing these issues.

Indeed, when considering the highly gendered nature of war, we should pursue a more in-depth understanding of how new and more advanced patterns of warfare affect entire populations; how women, men, girls and boys can differently influence and be impacted by threats to our security due to their gender.

The ability to analyse this war through a gender perspective would enable us to conduct a better comprehensive analysis of its different components, allowing us to better predict, prevent and mitigate risks to our operations in the future.

The way forward requires that we invest in and promote solutions to counter disinformation promoted by those that want to destroy our values.

Russia – and its allies – often frame gender equality as a threat to culture and traditional values, placing not only NATO and the EU as political and military threats, but the democratic world order as a whole as a threat to Russian interests and their way of living.

Men, women, boys and girls are often targeted by Russian disinformation campaigns. These campaigns usually send out the message that the NATO membership will entail the loss of traditional values and forced acceptance of “Western gender norms”, which represents the “decay of Western civilization”.

Furthermore, these disinformation campaigns and the promotion of “true” and “traditional” European values are seen as a strategy used to destabilise the EU, where Europe is portrayed as a continent “in chaos and decline”, and in which “gender ideology” increasingly appears in connection with Europe and is allowed to symbolise “a stand-in for Western geopolitical strategy”.

Russia has intentionally targeted and exploited societal gender fault lines through hybrid warfare as a reliable tactic for destabilizing cohesion and unity among populations throughout Europe. Estimates point that the Kremlin’s budget allocated over 1,3 billion euros to disinformation campaigns in 2021 alone.

This hostile strategic communication approach of framing “gender ideology” as a threat and appealing to far-right groups, mainly in Europe, is arguably an issue of increasing relevance to European security. In order to stop it, there must be a strong and cohesive strategy throughout NATO allies and within the EU, with enough resources preventing the far-right agenda to prevail over human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I mentioned before, I believe it is up to us to defend our values and counter disinformation strategies disseminated by those that seek to undermine our values.

A part of our response must go through achieving the promise of Resolution 1325, adopted by the UN Security Council on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October of 2000, and reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. If we fail to achieve this, we are depriving ourselves of the means to achieve peace.

Integrating a gender perspective in everything we do requires a long-term commitment and bold steps at the highest levels – often where men are the decision-makers. Women are essential to identifying durable and inclusive solutions that can lead to sustainable peace and to identifying the needs of those on the ground, often overshadowed by men’s lack of understanding.

Decision-makers at the highest levels, such as ourselves, need to address this topic, to move beyond words to actions, and beyond scattered initiatives to more systematic public policies that can properly sustain the necessary changes. This is the only way to ensure coherence and sustainability of results in the quest for equality.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda and gender perspective should be placed as a core leadership element in the Defence domain; not as something extra, but as something essential to further promote democratic values and human rights across the globe.

To achieve and implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda, we must continue to collect data and to analyse information from a gender perspective, through gender-disaggregated data, making it possible to analyse the potential impacts. Given the gender-differentiated human-security impacts of the war, the collection and inclusion of data related to these gender-based harms will allow to build on more complete situational awareness for decision-makers at all levels.

Portugal is committed to playing its part, and we know that we must lead by example. Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security are streamlined as guiding principles in the policies of the Portuguese Government, and Defence is no exception. We are and we want to be at the forefront of these efforts.

Thank you very much.